

Description, Analysis, Prognosis, Polemics

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN NIGERIA

By

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So-called ethnic conflicts and the demand for states in Nigeria arise from objective social conditions. They are not the product of primitive tribal suspicion and hatred, the whims of politicians, or so-called teething troubles in a young state! Clamping down on those who advocate states or simply ignoring the advocacy will only drive below the surface the discontents which give rise to it. The creation of a state may not be the political solution to any particular set of discontents, but unless we examine the objective causes of state agitation we shall never know whether a demand for a state ought indeed to be granted. Short of granting it, we shall remain ignorant of how to meet the discontents in other ways.

The demand for states arises out of social contradictions. It is connected with Nigerian social structure and dynamics. In political science the demand for national separation, integrity or unity is called the 'national question'. It is our purpose to demonstrate that a scientific and, therefore, objective and unbiased understanding of what is involved in the national question in Nigeria is bound up with an understanding of social dynamics in this country and the contradictions to which the dynamic orientations give rise.

An objective **scholarly** analysis of anything in Nigeria is bedevilled by bogus scientific concepts, theories and tools taken from universities in capitalist countries with which these issues are customarily approached.

No one can understand the character of contradictions, where they must lead and how they may be resolved, without the aid of dialectics and historical materialism.

The dialectic is a tool forged to facilitate study of real processes, to examine the structure of society, the unities and incompatibilities or contradictions of this structure, and the link of social changes, events and problems with these structures, processes and contradictions. There are many detailed ~~methodological dos and don'ts~~ of a technical character contained in the modern dialectical method. But let us say that it is the dynamic method par excellence. Let us observe, further, that the notions of function and disfunction, of potentiality and actuality, of structuralism, of cybernetics, of interdependence of phenomena in whole-part complexes (or the so-called 'field' concept), of development, of essential and circumstantial conditions of dynamics, all of which have come to gain currency among various groups of bourgeois scholars, are all contained in the dialectical method as developed by Marx and Engels and the more able of their scientific disciples.

Historical materialism is a method for the rigorous analysis and comparison of societies in terms of structure, function and mode of change. It is based on the discovery accepted as authentic by archeologists, objective historians, objective anthropologists and other objective

social scientists that the primary motive force in changes in man's culture and, therefore, in his history is his technology with which he constructs the material basis of his life. Whereas man is inclined to progress in terms of his technology and, therefore, in his economy, all other elements in the social organisation are inherently conservative, since they are designed to conserve a particular form of society. Law, custom, family arrangements and norms and religious institutions are essentially conservative. They change only in response to changes in man's mastery of material arts, a mastery which compels him to do some new thinking about his society and effect changes in his social organisation.

This approach which traces important political and cultural processes, contradictions and problems to their roots in the conditions and processes of material culture is a general approach to the study of society. It does not deny the manifold ways in which any particular change may come about owing to concrete historical circumstances. It does not deny the role of other elements in influencing the specific character of social dynamics. It does not deny that man has a plurality of motives and not only an economic one in any historical situation. It does not imply that each people must pass through the same or any specific pattern of changes. It does not deny that given certain circumstances specific historical stages^{of} development can be skipped by a particular people. Far from denying, it rather recognises, local variations in structures and processes essentially similar, such as the variations in the so-called process of 'modernisation' which is taking place in the contemporary world in all underdeveloped countries.

Nor does it minimise the importance of such variations for the explanation of events or elucidation of causes and problems.

The aim of the historical materialist approach was and is to save social science from subjectivity and all sorts of sentiments arising from religious bias, ethnocentrism, racialism and similar deformations of observation and thought.

Being dialectical, the historical materialist approach to social analysis does not suffer from the mechanistic conception of cause and effect of which malevolent bourgeois falsifiers sometimes accuse it and are themselves overwhelmingly guilty. It does not suffer from the faults of one-sidedness, presumption of harmony even in the midst of violent **crises**, static fallacy and teleological orientation of which an approach like the functional one is guilty. Its adoption gives a social scientist a strategy and tactics for penetrating society's seeming mysteries and confusions, and saves him from eclecticism, irrelevance, frivolous concern with the inconsequential and superficiality.

Contrary to certain distorted understanding among certain scholars, historical materialism is not coterminous with class analysis. If in many applications of the historical materialist approach the focus rests on class structure and contradictions as the basic principle for understanding social events, that is only because apart from small-scale primitive hunting, gathering and farming communities, all other societies are stratified systems.

To understand their dynamics we have to focus not on their family, clan or ethnic compositions but on the kind of group hierarchy characterising them.

The hierarchical pattern is based on ways of material life and divides people into significant strata and sub-groups with economic and associated political and cultural proclivities and ambitions. These groups and their ambitions, actions and contradictions constitute the points of departure, so to say, for understanding the links and complexities of major events, changes or problems. Other groupings of men in society, for instance, into religious or ethnic groups are given due attention, depending on the event or problem. On the whole, however, these are regarded as a historical setting for the play of dynamic forces set in motion by the techno-economic situation and processes and the class ambitions associated therewith.

All modern states are stratified societies or a complex composite of such societies. To speak of Nigerian social structure as Post and Vickers do in their book, 'Structure and Conflict in Nigeria' as if Nigeria were no more than an agglomeration of tribes is thus a very false abstraction indeed. With such a myopic, ethnocentric and scientifically irresponsible conception of 'structure', it is no accident that a host of European and American bourgeois scholars and their indigeneous followers find events like coups, civil wars, secessions, national agitations, etc. either inexplicable or to be due so-called teething troubles, administrative incompetence or corruption. Thus, in explaining the Nigerian civil war, O'Connell traces it to violent ethnic conflict, an explanation no more profound than that of a 'collector' at an Aba motor park.

Certainly, much of the social scientific analysis being done is no help to governments and peoples hard pressed with great and novel problems. A lot of it can be ignored without loss. Much of it can, in fact, be ignored with advantage, since it is arbitrary, subjective, eclectic, superficial and misleading. As for the national question, it has been treated simply as 'tribal conflict'.

We intend in a summary way to throw historical materialist light on the national question to see what insight it gives us into the problem.

Definition and Origin of the National Question

Let us start by defining the national question a bit more closely. The national question is the issue of the recognition of the dignity, unity, integrity and freedom of peoples. For any people, however this is defined, the national question may be a question of internal or external relations.

Three categories are relevant in speaking of the national question: nationalities or ethnic groups, nations, that is, modern nations, and states which in the modern context are nation-states. A nationality I define simply as any people speaking one main language/though there may be local variations and sharing other cultural characteristics. Examples are the English nationality, the Yoruba nationality or Tiv nationality. A nation I define as a group of nationalities that have come to share a common economy, a common history and elements of a common culture and among whom there is a sentiment of common belonging such that there arises a dominant desire to be recognised and treated by the outside world as one political entity. There is, associated with this the desire for the status of an independent nation-state. A nation in this sense is a product of the bourgeois historical epoch, beginning from the Dutch

revolt in the 17th century. Modern nationalism is an ideological phenomenon characterising nation formation and the national struggles of peoples in this sense. Such peoples are usually groups of nationalities or sometimes one nationality that had been part of either a feudal or a bourgeois empire. Examples are Canada, India or Nigeria.

A state I define as a territorial political machinery expressing the power of a dominant social class or group of such classes over a defined territory or group of territories. An empire consists of a state having territorial tributaries or satellites which subserve the metropolitan state.

The national question is connected with the rise of states and empires, since the subjugation or political integration of peoples and national liberation struggles emerge in history with the rise of states.

From the history of Egypt and Meroe or from the clear Zulu or Roman evidence of the rise of states we see that the state is a force created out of and meant to **resolve** social contradictions. With the rise of wars of conquest, one clan imposes its will permanently on another, one class its will permanently on another. Thus a machinery transcending tribe and clan territorial boundaries and meant to override ethnic-territorial antagonisms and hold down subject classes and territories emerges.

As Engels observed, the state as a social phenomenon represents recognition that the contradictions of tribal society have assumed a new character which cannot be contained within the old communal clan and tribal constitutions which rested on the equal traditional authority and consensus of elders. With the rise of classes and wars of conquest emerge new and severe contradictions.

A force seemingly above society has to emerge and does emerge. Its essence is an apparatus of government, a monopoly of armed forces by a dominant group, and the rise of force to resolve in favour of a privileged group the class and ethnic-territorial contradictions.

Thus, right from the beginning, the state, state power and the national question go together. Since the state represents the dominant power of a class in a dominant nationality or clan, subject clans or nationalities become subordinated to the dominant class power in the dominating core nationality of the state or empire. The ruling class of the subjugated nationality, if this was also stratified in its social order, either fuses with the dominant ruling class or becomes a subject or client class or otherwise disintegrates as a class. This is what happened, for instance, to the class of Hausa nobles after the rise to dominant power of the Fulani elite. In this case the Hausa nobility disintegrated and the emirates in Northern Nigeria became a Fulani empire with a Fulani nobility ruling over a mixed Hausa and Fulani population. In traditional power terms, therefore, that is, in terms of control over the peasantry and in terms of national priority, the so-called Hausa-Fulani block is in essence of a Fulani presence.

This association existing between unequal distribution of power, class, nationality, national and class contradictions, and the state-- this whole matrix of relations -- is useful to bear in mind in approaching the national question. It helps us to cut our way through hypocrisies and false noises.

Items in the National Question

In Nigeria the national question involves Nigeria as a nation-state and her relation as such with external forces that may undermine her integrity. This is the external aspect of our national question.

It involves also the question of the terms on which the nationalities within her territory can co-exist rather than fall apart, or exist in harmony rather than at daggers drawn. This is the internal aspect.

It is obvious that one aspect is connected with the other.

On deeper analysis, the national question of Nigeria is not simply a question of tribal rivalries, with the Yorubas, Ibos, Angas, or even Ijebus or Kano Hausas, to be considered simply as 'tribes' engaged in a wild orgy of chaos and hatred. To look at the matter this way is a superficial and simplistic practice of expatriate journalism and bourgeois scholarship. The national question, of deeper analysis, falls into six distinct, though connected issues.

I shall tabulate these issues as they now stand before defining and discussing them. They are:

1. the issue of Nigeria's integrity and her strength or even survival as a nation in the face of imperialist intrigues;
2. the issue of contradictions between the elites of the three dominant competing national groups: Ibo, Yoruba, Fulani-Hausa;
3. the so-called north-south confrontation;
4. interstate contradictions and rivalries, for instance, over revenue allocation, location of oil refineries, etc. which in the nature of things involves the interest of the paramount national group in each state;

5. inter-ethnic contradictions within a mixed state, for instance, between the Edo and the non-Edo in the Mid-West, the Ijaw and the non-Ijaw in the Rivers State, sections of the North-- Eastern or Benue-Plateau States and so on throughout all the mixed states in the present solution;
6. intersectional rivalries within a nationality or language group, as for instance, between the Okrikas and the Kalabaris, both basically Ijaw; between different sections of the Yoruba nationality; between the Onitsha and non-Onitsha Ibos;
7. inter-clan contradictions within a province or district.

The first five may be called macroscopic national contradictions because they directly affect national politics. We may refer to the last two as microscopic contradictions, since they can be regarded as inter-ethnic.

The first we shall refer to as the external national question and the other six as issues in the internal question.

We shall be mainly concerned with the internal national question, but we must make clear the link between this and the external one.

Nigeria needs national unity in her struggle against imperialism both in her own interest and in the interest of Africa and the Black people. The importance of this can be seen in the fact that when Ojukwu ignored this dimension of the national question by declaring secession, practically the whole of Africa rallied against him. The integrity of Nigeria is necessary for successfully prosecuting the issues before the African and Black revolutions at this stage of world history.

Looking more deeply at the external national question, it can be said that only a united people can fight imperialism. The type of solution applied to the internal national question, therefore, can enhance or obstruct the struggle of a multi-national state against imperialism. Only a thoroughly democratic solution, linked with popular solutions to other questions, has any chance of really mobilising the people for an effective struggle against such a sophisticated and ubiquitous foe as modern imperialism, which now operates as a thousand-headed monster with batalions of fifth columns and running dogs in the guise of neo-colonialism.

Important as ethnic unity is, however, it would be dangerous one-sidedness to see the issue of national unity solely in terms of it. The general strike, 1964, the boycott of the 1964 federal election by the UPGA alliance, the mass uprising in Yorubaland, 1965 and 1966, the violent eruptions there even as the civil war raged, and the coup d'etat of January, 1966 were not ethnic conflicts. If a country's government persists in robbing the many Peters to pay the few Pauls, the millions of cheated Peters sooner or later will stage strikes, riots, uprisings, boycotts, civil disobedience, acts of thuggery and terrorism, coups d'etat, or even accept the challenge of a civil war. The country cannot then be said to be united.

Therefore, in the case of Nigeria and similar cases the course open to a non-eclectic science is to seek out the common cause which manifests itself now as ethnic imbroglio, now in other types of conflict which it is a sadistic falsification to call 'ethnic'.

What the Issues Involve

It is wrong, as we have seen, for some scholars to describe Nigeria's social structure exclusively in terms of tribes and to see Nigeria's conflicts as tribal. In fact, behind Nigeria's so-called tribal conflicts lies a non-tribal essence. Neither the conflicts previously mentioned nor the civil war were tribal conflicts simpliciter. Some of them had no ethnic aspect. And these are the major conflicts the country has experienced since 1960, apart from the Tiv revolt and the Action Group and Western Region crisis which, again, were not at bottom tribal. The ethno-centric, contemptibly shallow, and utterly **nischievous** newspaper-reporter approach to our conflicts must be firmly jettisoned.

There are ethnic sets in this country as there are in the United Kingdom, but these sets are woven together by the country's material life. That life proceeds from five basic modes of production and one dominant process of material culture and these define the basic relations among Nigerians and give rise to basic economic, political and cultural processes.

We have, first, the mode of production represented by the expatriate enclave in the Nigerian economy; secondly, indigenous capitalism in embryo; thirdly, state production, accumulation, appropriation and distribution; fourthly, remnants of so-called traditional semi-feudal or patron-client modes in most areas of the country; fifthly, the so-called traditional communal mode in some parts. There are other modes such as the **handicraft** and co-operative peasant modes which are of some political importance, though not relevant to the present discussion.

These modes of production are undergoing change, some developing, others either disintegrating or changing form.

The crucial generator of change is the growth of machine-technology and its concomitant organisational imperatives. The dominant process of the whole system is the one popularly described as modernisation. However, attitudes to modernisation differ according to class position, and the position of each class cannot be understood without analysing the various modes of production, the dominant process and the historical situation of the country as a whole. We cannot here embark on such analysis.

Suffice it to say that on the whole Nigeria is **passing** through the stage of so-called modernisation which Marxian economists identify as **one** of primitive accumulation of capital. This is the stage of transition from the traditional non-machine economy to a capitalist machine-based economy. At this stage, capitalism as a social system is not yet definitely ^{constituted but the capitalist} class is being formed out traders, swindlers, sharp-dealing politicians, corrupt bureaucrats and even military adventurers. By hook and by crook they extort out of the rest of society the money, the capital, that turns them into capitalists. Their god is cash, their morality the growth of their bank balances.

The effect of these various modes of production and the dominant process of primitive accumulation which superintends their development or disintegration is to create various interest groups whose ambitions or awareness is vital to understanding issues in Nigeria/politics in general and the national question in particular.

As already hinted, it is the process of primitive accumulation that dominates Nigeria's economic and political life and conditions cultural life processes among the major

decision makers big and small. Essentially the process popularly known as "modernisation" is in this country the process of primitive capitalist accumulation in symbiosis with the process of decolonisation and the process of nation formation.

Now, let us look a little more closely into the process of primitive accumulation, since it is so important. It is a process in which no one lucky enough to be able to engage in wealth grabbing wants to be left behind.

Participating in primitive accumulation are city business tycoons, traditional chiefs undergoing capitalist metamorphosis, bureaucrats in government establishments and firms, a host of petty bosses such as workshop and transport owners, farm owners and traders employing a few people on a permanent or seasonal basis, and even a number of rich peasants and semi-rural middlemen employing seasonal labour or exploiting child labour, who hope to become successful urban capitalists or capitalist farmers. There is bound up with this process the struggle for posts by bureaucrats or would-be bureaucrats, out of which they earn or hope to earn an income far out of proportion with service rendered, a legacy of the colonial set-up. There is the urge for 'education', not so much genuine knowledge as certificate **grabbing**, for this enhances one's opportunity to exploit the scarcity of high or medium level personnel.

The process of primitive accumulation proper embraces loans from the federal, state and local governments to Nigerian businessmen and accumulating farmers; award of contracts and sub-contracts by all state levels and expatriate enterprises to businessmen; the secondary financing and subordination of local businessmen by

/ direc- Foreign monopolies through partnership, tenancy, agency, or/-
torship arrangements; the granting of loans by banks in some of
which the federal and state governments have large interests;
the building of an infra-structure of schools, roads, etc.,
which enhance and stimulate the process of primitive accu-
mulation; the expansion of towns as centres of state and
commercial activity and the growth of urban landlordism
which draws from the income of wage earners.

The whole process of primary accumulation -- to adopt
another term sometimes preferred -- consists in the mobili-
zation of peasant and mineral surpluses. This is done by
the governments through various kinds of taxes and by
foreign monopolies and local businessmen through the process
of unequal international and local trade. These surpluses
are then distributed to businessmen through various appro-
priative processes, including loans, contracts, direct
subsidies, salaries, debt write-offs, commissions, etc.
A large state sector and modern government-financed
development consciousness permit the existence and rapid
expansion of bureaucracies, exalted or minute, on the
national, state and division levels who share in the dis-
tribution of the peasant and mineral surpluses, either by
participation in business or simply as a privileged and
parasitic traditional, bureaucratic or intellectual
stratum.

The whole intricate machinery of primitive accumulation
is served by the stinking gush of bribery, embezzlement,
ten-percent deals, fictitious business formation and other
forms of corruption which grease its cogs.

The process offers vast opportunities to make "fast
money by faster means", with apologies to Cyprian Ekwensi.
It is a process from which no group is excluded save the
millions of peasants and wage workers who sweat to produce

the actual national cake for which others scramble. It is a process into which many are drawn but from which only a few stand any chance of emerging successful. It is also a ruthless struggle for which there are no rules, no standards, no scruples. It is a process that goes on at all levels right down to the village. It sets up antagonisms between

and individual,
 /- and individual / group and group at all levels who find themselves somehow opposed in the scramble or standing in one another's way. It promotes ambitions and spurious philistine alliances which are piously proclaimed in the morning only to be dissolved in the evening as fortunes and expectations change.

Like other processes of capitalist civilisation, the process of primitive accumulation stimulates uneven development and rears oppositions, hatreds and antagonisms arising from unequal struggle for life, unequal chances and exploitation of the weak by the strong.

For the capitalists prey on the workers and peasants, the monopolies and their agents prey on the other capitalists, the tycoons prey on the lesser breed of businessmen, the towns prey on the country, the nationality that is relatively developed in liquid capital, infrastructure and personnel preys on the less fortunate, and the ethnic group whose bourgeois elite happen to enjoy a political advantage from constitutional arrangements immediately uses that power to pounce on its helpless neighbours. The whole country becomes a huge carcass for bits of whose flesh tigers, dogs, vultures, rats, cocroaches, magots, lice and bacteria engage in a deadly and unceasing scramble.

What insight does the foregoing analysis afford us into the various aspects of the national question? Let us take first the external question. The interest of monopoly enterprise exerts an expatriate influence, scholarly or other on the national question in Nigeria. This Country was ruled by Britain, and British interests and conceptions of politics greatly affect policy and law makers here. During the Henry Willink Commission, it was known in some circles that an oil company submitted a memorandum opposing the creation of states. It is known that French imperialism financed secession. It is known that a West African Common Market is a desideratum if the sovereignty of West African Countries, including Nigeria, is to have any real meaning in the present world context. But it is known also how much French imperialism is opposed to the emergence of such a union and what it has been doing to thwart the constructive efforts of Nigeria in this respect. There is no doubt that but for the relative unity of the Nigerian Federal Government achieved through the creation of states under the present military leadership, the intrigues of French imperialism would have been much more successful. It is known how the imperialist union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, has been trying to woo Nigeria against the common interests of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting countries. It is obvious that if Nigeria had been too much of a house divided against itself as in the First Republic, the front of OPEC and our sovereignty would have been greatly compromised by our weakness.

It is clearly observable that foreign commentators on the Nigerian scene from NATO countries hardly ever describe a Nigerian public man by his name and function alone; his description is not considered complete or significant unless it features his tribe and former region or present state,

former region especially if he happens to hail from the former Northern Nigeria. Divide et impera, divide and rule, is an age-long maxim of colonialist domination. To hold down its victims, in every crisis imperialism uses as agent provocateur the weakest link in its chain of oppressed peoples. The lesser our ethnic unity the easier and longer it is for imperialism to exploit this country without an effective leadership to challenge it and to take this country for granted in its machinations against the liberation of African peoples.

So far with the importance of the external aspect of the national question and its link with the internal aspects. Let us now turn to what is really involved in each of the internal aspects.

What appears on the surface as Ibo-Yoruba/Hausa confrontation is actually a deep contradiction between the Ibo bourgeois elite and the Yorubabourgeois elite and between either of them and the Fulani-Hausa elite for the control of the Federal Government and the sharing of federal funds, position and power. The three-region arrangement helped to create a political staging ground for this conflict, since each of the three regions was in actual fact an empire of one of the three dominant elites.

The so-called north-south confrontation has two aspects: an aspect arising from class contradictions and an aspect arising from uneven development. Owing to the development of trade and the so-called middle class in the south, we have a situation where the national bourgeois elite is more concentrated in the southern provinces and are fairly well developed among the Yorubas and Ibos, whilst the most powerful traditional ruling elite, including princes and traditional officials of a decaying feudal order together with traditional merchant tycoons now metamorphosing into

a modern bourgeois elite, are mainly concentrated in the far northern provinces.

There is an ideological and power struggle between the two elite formations: bourgeois, located mainly in the south and traditional, located most powerfully in the north. The bone of contention is the control of the Federal Government, involving how much power that government should be allowed to have and who should run it and in whose interest. This was quite clear in the whole politics leading to the emergence of the UPGA and NNA alliances. That this confrontation is far from dead became painfully evident in statements made after the release in 1974 of the preliminary census figures.

That none of these two alliances, UPGA/United Progressive Grand Alliance/ and NNA/ Nigerian National Alliance/ was strictly north or south in composition or programme is an objective fact showing that the actual confrontation is not regional. The leadership and programme of the UPGA was definitely bourgeois, whilst that of the NNA was clearly feudalistic or traditionalistic, backed as it was by a sprinkling of conservative bourgeois support, which is usually the case with such alignments. When this confrontation is misrepresented as a north-south one, the Middle Belt is conveniently ignored as an embarrassing nuisance to such a characterisation. Strong forces in the Middle Belt fought the leading forces of the NNA tenaciously throughout the First Republic and even by prolonged popular insurrection in Tiv Division. Yet the Middle Belt was in Northern Nigeria. Similarly, the NEPU /Northern Elements Progressive Union/, maintained an intransigent opposition to the so-called anti-south forces in Northern Nigeria throughout the First Republic, and the NEPU opposition was by no means an insignificant or imported one.

The second aspect of the so-called north-south confrontation is that it does have some roots in uneven development as ~~the~~ between the two regions. The **southern** part of the **country** is more developed, say, in education. Hence arise the fear of domination by well-intentioned people in the northern **provinces** of the country. Actually, this is not a geographical north-south matter, because within the south itself and within the north the same fear of domination of relatively less advanced by relatively more advanced areas exists. For example, the whole country is resentful of the advantages which oil gives to some areas under the derivation scheme, and fear has been expressed of the eventual domination of other nationalities by Yoruba millionaires created by the present scheme to transfer ownership or partial ownership of expatriate enterprises to indigeneous capitalists, with the massive aid of federal government finance. This fear is legitimate and arises from the fact that as matters stood when this scheme was launched and as they still stand, businessmen of Yoruba origin enjoyed a paramount advantage over others. There are areas where there are hardly any indigenous businessmen to talk about, when it comes to such an affair as the take-over scheme.

The real contradiction, then, is between the more developed and the less, and, not only in Nigeria but throughout the so-called Western world this kind of confrontation goes on at all levels, international, national and local. It is acute in Britain or the United Kingdom.

This brings us to inter-state rivalries. Within each state there exists an established and nascent and ambitious elite of traditionalists and rising bourgeois who see the levers of the state as an opportunity for status enhancement, status transformation or bourgeois accumulation. Recent agitations in the states involving, for instance, dismissals and affidavits, point to this. In such a circumstance, each state is fiercely jealous of its power and the first group to control of the state jealous of its opportunity

to loot.

A factor to be considered in inter-state rivalry is government share in primary accumulation, investment in projects, appropriation and distribution. The sharing of revenue, the location of industries, the control of marketing boards or the corporations, the making of federal loans, the employment of citizens of so-called alien states and the acquisition of land by such citizens become areas where various elite chauvinisms manifest themselves under the mask of inter-state conflict. An example is that the establishment of an iron and steel industry was held up by so-called inter-state conflicts. We all know the conflicts connected with the siting of oil refineries. Apart from such cases, there is some inter-state bitterness left by the events in and around the civil war.

Inter-ethnic rivalries within a mixed state arise from two sources. The first is that each mixed state has a paramount or largest ethnic group. The elite of this group use their opportunities to enhance the positions of themselves and their kin and to influence in favour of their native ethnic areas the siting of the state's development projects. In the competition for capital accumulation, the bourgeoisie of the paramount nationality is favoured. They get the contracts and the loans. Widespread nepotism, crude chauvinism and corruption in an increasingly bourgeois society favour unashamed discrimination.

There arises the fear that the members of the less privileged ethnic groups will degenerate into hewers of wood and drawers of water for the elite of the favoured group. This is clearly implied in recent petitions to General Gowon which cannot all be dismissed as so many puffs of smoke without fire.

In this situation the protest of the embryonic bourgeoisie of the lesser groups merges with the genuine popular protest against discrimination to the extent that it becomes difficult, especially at this level, to distinguish between genuine popular agitation and nascent bourgeois jingoism. In any case, ambitious men and genuine local patriots put themselves at the head of a group discriminated against.

Alternative Solutions

We cannot set out to resolve the national question without asking ourselves what we hope to achieve. Dr. Azikiwe and others have emphasised the aim of stability. I reject this emphasis. Since the rise of the state in history there have been two groups of political analysts. There are those who, from Plato to our day, go to political science to seek the conditions of stability. These men are usually spokesmen of a ruling class or a dominant nationality seeking a means to the perpetuation of the status quo. All that interests them is how they can continue to live on top of others without agitations, demonstrations, strikes, riots, uprisings, coups and popular or patriotic liberation wars.

There are, however, those who go to political science to seek the conditions for as much freedom in any situation as men can have. For that matter, unity as a goal is much more worthy of pursuit than stability. It must be borne in mind that progress is essentially a destabilising phenomenon and to seek stability and rapid progress at the same time is often self-contradictory.

Admittedly, stability is one of the aims of man in society. A situation in which men do not know what to expect the next day when they wake up or whether they will even wake up at all cannot and will not be tolerated.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that freedom is a more basic aim for man than stability of expectations. Were it not so men would not be ready to sacrifice themselves in thousands as they do, age after age, and in all lands and climes for freedom.

Besides, any solution which denies men the measure of freedom attainable by them in any historical situation is inherently unstable. Any purported solution to the national question taken in isolation from other questions cannot bring stability to a country. Strikes, uprisings, coups and civil wars may be staged on issues of exploitation unconnected with the national question.

In approaching a solution to the national question in Nigeria I base myself on the democratic principle of the right of nations to self-determination. This is the principle which I emphasise as against stability. The goal of self-determination for each ethnic group in Nigeria is what the scheme of states in this country should seek to achieve.

The right of nations or nationalities or ethnich groups to self-determination is an extension of the democratic principle of freedom of association.

Using 'nations' in this context to mean nations strictly defined as well as nationalities or ethnic groups, socialists subscribe to the principle of the right of nations to self-determination. This stand of the socialists, especially Marxists, arises from the awareness that unequeal distribution of opportunities and power, no matter its cause, is the most persistent and pervading cause of man's antagonism to man and, therefore, of conflict in society.

In the discussion that follows I shall exclude solution by what political scientists call a unitary constitution, that is, a constitution in which we have only the central

government and local administrations, but no state governments. The unitary solution to the problem of Nigeria's political unity I regard as unrealistic and harmful. In the prevailing circumstances it must run roughshod over the right of peoples to self-determination and violently counter to popular desire. The experiment of the Ironsi regime with this solution shows that it must invite a violent reception. Besides, in terms of the substantial requirements of freedom and national unity a unitary solution is quite unnecessary and can only serve the interest of some inordinately ambitious group.

Similarly, let us rule out a confederal solution. A confederal solution does not give us a nation-state, and what the people of this country do want to build is a nation-state. Aburi and its aftermath have settled that matter definitively for any panel in the present circumstance which may look into the national question.

Let us, then, turn to federal solutions.

Chief Awolowo in his 'Thoughts on the Constitution' advocates states based on nationalities. He interpretes the right of nations to self-determination to mean the right of **each** nationality to a single state.

First of all, this one-nationality-one-state scheme would be difficult to apply, as Chief Awolowo himself discovered. Its application ^{would yield over a hundred states which} would be a ridiculous solution. Besides, it cannot even be applied in some provinces where, for instance, Fulanis and others live mixed together without neat territorial separations.

Furthermore, his interpretation of the principle of the right of peoples to self-determination must be rejected. This principle is not a warrant for any one-nationality-one-state dogma. All that it means in the nationality context

is that no nationality or part thereof should be placed in a position where it can be politically dominated by another nationality. The principle does not rule out many states being organised out of a single nationality, as with the Germans and the Arabs. Nor does it exclude the organisation of a multi-ethnic state, provided one ethnic group is in no position to dominate another in that state as the Czechs could and did dominate the Slovaks in a unitary Czechoslovak state.

My minimum solution, then, to the national question in Nigeria, that is, my solution in the present circumstance, is a scheme of states such that either the state is ethnically monolithic or, where it is mixed, no language group or nationality should be so large that it can numerically dominate all the others put together. In the present twelve-state scheme, Kano, East Central, Western and Lagos states are ethnically neat or monolithic. All the others are mixed. I see no harm in this mixture provided there is no state in which one ethnic group is in a position to dominate all the others put together.

Since we are discussing only principles, there is no need to examine every state in the present solution. It is sufficient to use the South-Eastern State to illustrate what the application of our principle involves.

Here all those speaking what the Ibos call 'Mmono' language, that is, language more or less related to Ibibio, may be regarded as one nationality. As such, they outnumber those who are not of this group who live mainly in the former Ogoja Province. On the other hand there are certain distinctions and factors of history involved. The Efiks, though originally an Ibibio group and speaking what is in essence an Ibibio dialect, have long ceased to consider themselves Ibibio. The people of Oron Division also do not consider themselves Ibibio. There are also

cultural links between the Oron, Efik, Qua and Ogoja peoples, namely, trade and the Ekpe Society, although these are not connections unique to these and separating them completely from the Ibibios.

Now, the total population of the state under consideration according to the 1963 census is 3.5 million roughly. Out of this the 'Mmono' group are roughly 2.7 million, that is 77 per cent, leaving the non-'Mmono' with about .8 million or roughly 23 per cent. This being the situation, if all of the 'Mmono' cluster are regarded as belonging to one nationality, then the South-Eastern State does not satisfy the criterion of the right of nations to self-determination. In that case the state has to be split and the solution adopted will be that of the British administration which created the Calabar and Ogoja Provinces on the basis of the distinction between the 'Mmono' and the non-'Mmono' in the area, given the close historical, cultural, economic and political association of the non-'Mmono' peoples of Calabar Division with the Efiks of the 'Mmono cluster. If, on the other hand, the Ibibio group, that is the central Ibibio, **Anang** and Eket, who have a very close linguistic and cultural solidarity and who all formed the Ibibio State Union, are regarded as one ethnic group, they still constitute a majority, a slight one, over the others put together. This group are 1.9 million or 54.3 per cent of the total population of the state. Considering the Union Ibibio group as one ethnic entity distinct from the rest, the state still has to be split, but in this case the solution will follow the lines suggested by recent advocates of a Cross River State. However, the actual historical, and cultural affinity of the Ibibios and the Efiks - the Efiks are actually recent emigrants from Ibibioland - is an argument against splitting the state along these lines.

Now, let us consider the monolithic states. In the present circumstance, serious consideration must be given to the splitting of the East Central and the Western states. The reason for this is connected with the external national question. This country needs unity. We cannot come by it if we do not completely destroy the constitutional instruments available to Ibo, Yoruba and Fulani-Hausa elite rivals. It is the antagonisms arising from this particular rivalry that have played most dangerously into the hands of imperialism and local opportunists and lackeys of neo-colonialism. A thoroughly patriotic solution to the national question will require the courageous smashing up of the basis of this cancer.

So long as the Ibo and the Yoruba elites have available to them large monolithic states which politically and even constitutionally permit them to consolidate their chauvinistic ambitions, the formal dissolution of the so-called Fulani-Hausa 'block' by its being split into the North-Western, North-Central and Kano states will never mean actual dissolution of the block. In recent months events have shown this danger. There still exist too many of northern states' this and northern states' that to remind us of the tendency to a block.

We need to create less opportunities for people to come up claiming to be spokesmen of all the Yorubas and spokesmen of all the Ibos. Only then can we cease to have a so-called 'spokesman of the north' and a spurious 'spokesman of the south'.

My advocacy of the splitting of these states, therefore, is not based on Dr. Azikiwe's arbitrary idea of population equality. It is based on the necessity, as things are, of making big-three confrontation as politically difficult as it can be made by the fundamental law of the republic.

After all, contrary to Chief Awolowo's presumption, the Yorubas do not necessarily want to form one state. Neither do the Ibos. By splitting the Western and East Central states, we shall kill two birds with a stone: smash up the power base of Ibo and Yoruba chauvinists and bring state responsibility and government nearer the people as demanded by widespread opinion in those two states today.

The democratic principle of bringing government nearer the people is one of those to bear in mind when considering the fate of states like the North-Western and the North-Eastern.

Our position on state delimitation is consistent with three solutions: Dr. Azikiwe's twenty-two state scheme, a state scheme based on the original twenty-four provinces with necessary adjustments to take account of minority pockets mentioned in the Willink Report, and possibly ^{the} few more states' solution hinted by General Gowon, provided the 'few more' will be so created as to realise internal self-determination for all groups and reduce as much as possible the danger to national unity posed by perennial big-three elite confrontation.

Of the solutions mentioned as consistent with our position, Dr. Azikiwe's scheme comes nearest to satisfying all desirable criteria, provided that no language group will be included in any state against the overwhelming desire of the people concerned.

There is actually no unique scheme for the delimitation of states in Nigeria. Any scheme that satisfies the principle of self-determination as defined above, secures the interest of national unity against big-three chauvinism, and pays attention to local history so that it satisfies local popular wishes to the maximum possible is a satisfactory minimum solution.

A detail that may be considered in the minimum solution is **the** Soviet principle of autonomous areas. This is the same principle as is adopted by the United Kingdom in respect of Northern Ireland and, to some extent, Scotland. In such a difficult case as the non-Ijaw area of the Rivers state where the issue of Port-Harcourt creates a special problem, the creation of an autonomous area may be considered.

Limits to the Minimum Solution

We said earlier that we were searching for a 'minimum solution' or solution 'in the present circumstances'. My aim now is to explain what is meant by this.

In the constitution of the First Republic, the size of the Northern Region, which was larger than all the others put together, implied the domination of the federation by a single state. The so-called north-south confrontation was significant partly because of this. The present twelve-state solution has completely removed the fear of domination of the federation by one state. But even so, the problem of 'north-south confrontation' remains unsolved, because of its other dimensions which we have examined. None of the other problems has been **completely** solved by the present scheme of states.

The question arises whether any scheme of states in the present circumstance can completely resolve any of the seven issues involved in the national question. The answer to this question is negative. In fact, no formal constitutional solution can **by** itself resolve the contradictions that **constitute** the national question.

The reason for this is that any solution applied now assumes the context of capitalist development. Now, capitalist development is inherently uneven. It is inherently a process of robbing Peter to pay Paul. The

bourgeoisie are inherently chauvinistic and, as they develop in each part of the country, they will continue to urge one group against another. Constitutional provisions will at best provide some restraints.

To think of completely settling the national question by the creation of states alone we would have to create a state for every **district** or clan or even every village or ward. The reason is that districts, **clans**, etc, are nowhere of uniform size, so that accusations of discrimination on ~~grounds~~ grounds of numerical advantage will always arise, so long as primitive accumulation with its accompanying selfishness, exploitation and **nepotism** the ruling process.

In the bourgeois **epoch** the multi-ethnic state, though it must exist as a historical necessity, is inherently unstable. This is shown in the cases of the United Kingdom, Canada, pre-socialist Czechoslovakia and pre-socialist Yugoslavia. The fraternity of peoples achieved depend on the equality in capital accumulating power **of** the bourgeois elites of the different nationalities. Since this is hardly **initially** the case of sooner or later ceases to be the case, multi-ethnic bourgeois states have an endemic problem of national contradictions which often intensify into antagonism.

Hence perpetual peaceful relations between peoples in a multi-ethnic bourgeois state is hardly possible. In this respect, a multi-ethnic state such as Canada or the United Kingdom must be distinguished from a federal mono-ethnic state such as the original United States or Australia.

Complete and permanent solution of the national question in a truly multi-national state is possible only in a socialist system of society.

Even at its best political self-determination in bourgeois society aims at creating national markets for competing bourgeois groups; it does not end either national

or any other social antagonisms generated by the exploitations and discriminations of the capitalist system.

The socialists carry the solution to the national question further. Their solution does not end with formal political self-determination. By abolishing private property acquisition and uneven advantages based thereon, by transferring all means of wealth and power into the hands of the people as a collectivity, socialism creates a situation in which chauvinism pays lower dividends, if any; unequal distribution of power as between nationalities is accelerated to create fundamental social equality.

The fundamental solution to the national question is the abolition of all exploitation and all unequal distribution of power between nationalities by transferring all power, and primarily all productive property as the material source of power, into the hands of the people as a collectivity.

The second way in which socialism solves fundamentally the national question is this. As we have seen, capitalism promotes uneven development and the dominations arising therefrom. Socialism is deliberately set against uneven development. In Nigeria, for instance, the bourgeoisie in the south have been opposing the use of federal revenue to accelerate the pace of development in northern Nigeria. They will not yield to what they see as 'holding the south back'. It is in the same way that the millionaires, say, in the United States, oppose the taxing of their wealth to provide basic amenities for masses of people condemned to poverty by the bourgeois system.

Under socialism, the ridiculous notion of some peoples being held back is simply irrelevant. In the first place, until everybody's need has been satisfied, society should not bother about some people's greed.

In the second place, the rate of development in socialist society is planned, scientifically stimulated and revolutionary, so that it is normally so rapid all round that the more advanced areas will still be advancing with unprecedented speed while other areas advance with extra acceleration to meet up.

In the third place, since socialist property is socially owned, development is less dependent than under capitalism on territorial location of industries. Industry located in one place is used to raise the standard of private and public life elsewhere. There is not the philistine territorial possessiveness one knows under capitalism.

Furthermore, under capitalism, the characteristic lop-sided and parasitic development in the long run retards even the progress of those who claim to be advanced.

Because the socialist solution to the national question rests on the abolition of all class and national exploitation, the socialist federal state can carry the political solution to this question even to the extent of writing a secession permit into the constitution. Only the constitution of the Soviet state contains such a provision, and that is not by accident.

A prediction is implied by the above analysis. We shall now make it explicit.

Whatever the number of states created, ethnic conflicts will continue in Nigeria. Its violence will depend on many factors. That it still has the potentiality for violence has been revealed in recent months.

Capitalist development financed by massive state expenditure will, of course, strengthen the links of mutual dependence between peoples. But it is the character of capitalist dialectics that the very process which hauls

people together also generates tendencies to set them in opposition. The forces at work necessitate the following prognoses.

First, to the extent that the state financing of capitalism generates uneven development real harmony cannot result.

Secondly, the huge expenditure will itself continue to be battle ground for chauvinism in the absence of a socialist government.

Thirdly, our process of nation formation takes place in the historical epoch of mankind's transition from exploitative societies to socialism. In this epoch, the more educated people become the more resentful they will grow of uneven development and discriminations against certain areas.

Under capitalism the south will definitely continue to develop faster than the northern part of the country. In fact some have already given up hope of the northern states ever catching up. This is not a hopeful prospect for the fraternity of peoples.

When one makes a prediction such as the above the non-Marxist scholars call it prophesy or pessimism. I would like to be as optimistic as anyone else. However, scientific predictions should be independent of our pet wishes and what I have done is to make scientific predictions.

In 1965 I predicted a civil war in Nigeria, based on my analysis of the irreconcilable character of the contradictions and the nature of the politics of the First Republic. Two lecturer friends of mine in Lagos University dismissed my prediction by dubbing it pessimistic and dogmatic.

But we did eventually have the civil war. After the war I met one of the lecturers again and tried to recall our prewar conversation. Quite as a matter of course he now claimed that everyone had always known there would be a civil war. Their action was characteristic of non-Marxist scholars.

It is convenient to be wise after the event, but that can be very costly. It is even more costly to remain unwise after the event. So far, many Nigerian intellectuals have hardly moved one step forward since the First Republic in their utterly pedestrian, even puerile, understanding of the national question. Far from helping the country they merely reflect and accentuate the prejudices and confusions of the man in the street.

The national question in Nigeria cannot be understood by bourgeois lawyers such as Dr. Elias whose recent pronouncement on the training of lawyers in the Soviet Union shows how very little he cares for a scientific consideration of socio-economic dynamics as a basis for legal solutions. With such men at the helm we have but the blind leading the blind. And with all the goodwill and legal legordemain in the world a complete solution to the national question is accesible only under socialism.

THE END.